

Trade in America 30.

A
P O L I T I C A L
P A R A D O X.

[Price SIX-PENCE.]

1777

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POLITICAL



PARTIAL

1841-1842

A

POLITICAL PARADOX.

We will restore to them the Blessings of Liberty.—

—fungemur vice Cotis, acutum

Reddere quæ ferrum valet exsors ipsa secandi.



L O N D O N:

Printed for J. ALMON, opposite Burlington-House, in
Piccadilly.

M D C C L X X V I I .

POSTAL PARADOX



POLITICAL PARADOX.

THE Minister has declared, on a solemn occasion, that he was *desirous of restoring to America the blessings of law and liberty* ; he adds, that he is persuaded his language is equally logical and affectionate. If Captain Macheath should promise to *restore* my purse, which he had yesterday taken from me on the road, I should no doubt understand his professions, but might perhaps feel some
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surprize, if, in the same instant, he prepared his pistols for a second assault. We may, however, presume to infer from the above sentence, (though perhaps not strictly logical) that the Minister believes we fancy ourselves happy in a constitutional freedom at home, or he would not exhort us to cross the Atlantic, with twenty thousand auxiliary law-givers from Hesse, and other well-disposed states, to obtrude our system of freedom on these ungrateful strangers. But before we set out to traverse Canada and New-York, it may not be a needless task to repair the ruins of *English* liberty, left on our return from American conquest, instead of a splendid fabrick, the work of ages, and the admiration of the world, we should behold her temple mouldering with decay, and tottering

tering to its basis with the slightest blast.

In the reign of Elizabeth, our ancestors were taught to believe themselves little better than vassals of the crown. Their properties were yet untaxed, their commerce flourished, their arms were respected abroad, nor could even a doubtful succession disturb their domestic repose. Their boroughs were uncorrupted, their statesmen of known integrity and wisdom. Yet Elizabeth would, contrary to modern professions, assure them, with great gravity, from the Throne, that they were all her slaves. Must the language of the Crown forever consist of falsehoods!

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As it had been discovered in the reign of Henry the VIth, that a certain set of men, containing, by estimation, about ninety-nine in an hundred of his Majesty's subjects, had resigned their hereditary freedom to those who could expend, if they pleased, forty shillings a year, England, even at its most fortunate period, the expulsion of the Stuarts, was a state of civil liberty, in reality, more than appearance. Let us examine if we have since inverted that condition.—If the senator or the country gentleman (whom I intend for five minutes to represent) shall sincerely feel themselves to be in the situation for which they contended in 1688, I think they would succeed better in poetry, than in the study of mathematicks.

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Behold me then, at the completion of manhood, with an independency of principles and fortune becoming my high station, an hereditary cousin and counsellor to the King; a legislator by birth, and alone entitled to an exemption from perpetual imprisonment in this land of freedom, if I contracted a debt exceeding two pounds.—Let me contemplate the objects with which I am surrounded in my patrimonial senate, and weigh the importance of my opinion in political debate. On one side I discover a venerable appearance of men, not, indeed, possessing, like myself, the gift of legislation at their birth, but whom a long course of affluence and dignity has raised, I suppose, to patrician independence.—But it remains to consider what opportunity of instruction I may obtain from their age and

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experience. Tho' feldom absent or uniform, I behold them silent and unanimous on every ministerial debate. The gift of tongues, it will be said, was not an hereditary bequest; and the innocency of silence is attended with contempt, and not danger. I will subjoin the description of the Macedonian phalanx, with which Philip destroyed the liberties of Greece: * "In utrumque lates instructi, sciebant stare, vel cedere loco, denso agmine pugnare, & nutum Ducis *silentio* intuen." To this sacred and immortal legion, let me add sixteen auxiliars, who are on no occasion allied so closely with the Episcopal band as in this House; together with fifty-

* Drawn up on either side, they knew how to shift their ground, to engage in a body, and to obey the commands of their leader in *silence*.

three Right Honourable Senators, who have *openly* enrolled their names, with their respective salaries on the Household, and other establishments. Admiring the singular good fortune of this country, that in so small a number of men, and in an age of general depravity, ninety-five Members may be at all times found unseduced by wealth itself and reputed honours, let me pass on to the Holy of Holies in the temple of the constitution, from which the American Continent is about to receive its code of freedom. Of forty Members, who are here competent to decide on the existence of the empire, the printed catalogue has avowed one hundred and thirty-one English placemen. This weight of influence, which, under any other reign

than the present, might introduce a frightful scene of venality, (for the present Monarch, as Mr. Fox has observed, is really fond of liberty) will be scarcely balanced by the opulence and integrity of forty-five Scotch Members; though, perhaps, if I had proceeded in the enquiry, they too would have been found to possess a considerable share of Court preferment. Here, amidst a mockery of debate, I may, in my turn, harrangue a careless, or, if I may be allowed the expression, an absent audience. It may be said, I am free to impart and receive conviction; yet Tartalus was not reputed free, whose hands were never bound, but who was confined within the sight of objects, which it was impossible he could ever attain. Bishop Burnet has observed, on

the force of elocution, "*that many who are inclined enough to vote in all obedience, are yet ashamed to be in the vote on the side that is manifestly run down in the debate.*" But the Bishop was writing the history of his own times. How long this may continue our security, it will not become me to determine; nor, perhaps, will it be safe, in this land of unexampled indulgence, to suspect the possibility of misconduct in men, whom we are at the same time supposed to create. Yet I have purchased abroad such remarks on policy and government as would have subjected an English printer to immediate persecution. I could wish to see the idea of liberty defined in a common *vocabulary of nations.*

But

But let us suppose the state at any distant period, intoxicated with some successful war, and from the uncommon merits of one man, disposed to place too great a confidence in her future Ministers; let us imagine the sudden death of the reigning Sovereign, and the succession of a new Monarch amidst all the advantages of youth and popularity; let us suppose him not so well instructed as his present gracious Majesty in the principles of freedom, but under the influence of an ignorant and despotic Favourite; what conduct would such a man compel his Sovereign to pursue? Unable to direct the mighty machine, he would stop it with the utmost hazard in its full career of conquest, and exchange certain victory for an ignominious peace.

He

He would purchase some semblance of approbation from the Senate, and he would begin by dishonouring those whom he could not corrupt. He would oppose the / personal popularity of the King, to the clamours of the nation, and would sometimes even feign the language of contrition, that he might for a moment seduce the honest to partake of his illegal power. He would submit himself to the enemies of his country, that he might be more at leisure to suppress his own. Terrified with guilt, he might at length retire from public view; but suppose him to have left his creatures in the highest departments of the realm, and to have poisoned beyond recovery the mind of his Royal Master. Conceive him to have left at the head of the law, a
man,

man, who, instead of judging between the Crown and the Subject, should interfere in the politicks of the Cabinet, and thus become a party in causes for which he is sworn an indifferent umpire. Suppose such a Favourite to have thus involved the kingdom in debt and infamy, and to have driven men of honour at a distance from the Throne; what would remain to compleat our misery, but that he should cry, *Havock, and let loose the dogs of civil war.* These, indeed, are improbable, but not impossible events. Could we, from a Senate like the present, expect a constitutional controul on such a man? Or, would the ponderous operation of government so far outweigh the empty scale of freedom, that we should have only left the wretched

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alternative of joining in the tyranny,
or of being ourselves enslaved?

From the senator, let us proceed to the
country gentleman. I hope the tran-
sition may become more fashionable than
in the present reign. I do not within
this description include the character
of every modern * Iden, but shall per-

* Vide the 2d part of HENRY VI. ACT IV.

SCENE I. Iden Solus.

“ Lord who would live permoiled in the Court,

“ And may enjoy such quiet walks as these.”

Vide almost the next page. SCENE Henry VI. Iden.

Henry——“ Rise up a Knight

“ I will that thou henceforth attend on me.”

Iden——“ May Iden live to merit such a bounty,

“ &c. &c.”

(After having received Knighthood, and a thousand marks.)

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sonate the respectable landholder, who is, by principle, as well as situation, at a constitutional distance from the Court. Confiding in the security of the laws, and disbelieving the existence of corruption in this purest of all possible states, am I not deluged with a torrent, of which, like the Ægyptian, I cannot discover the source. I have softened the dissensions, and relieved the wants of my neighbourhood; I have discharged with fidelity the several offices with which I have been entrusted by the laws; I have even aspired, though without success, to serve in a higher department of the state. An attorney's clerk, whom I had expelled from my neighbourhood for dishonest practice in his profession, on his return from the East Indies,

Indies, had the insolence to propose himself and one of his upper servants as the representatives of a neighbouring borough. The importunity of my friends encouraged me to oppose them; but on my unsuccessful canvass, I found Contractors, Excisemen, Supervisors, Postmasters, Officers of the Customs, Collectors of Taxes, with an hundred other dependants on the Crown, united in their support. By what constitutional means shall I resist the bribery of this usurper, after having exceeded the bounds of œconomy in the attempt? Will the Minister reward my pretensions in the person of my children, or must I immediately mortgage my estate to purchase their promotion in the army and the fleet?—that estate, from which I have

for these last twelve years of a peace establishment, paid fourteen shillings in the pound to different taxes, though some, I am informed, do not pay above eleven or twelve in support of our free, uncorrupt, and envied constitution.

Amidst the game laws, marriage laws, laws of inclosure, and distorted laws of impress, the English Commoner deserves a distinct essay for the display of his peculiar happiness. But the senator and the country gentleman, I suppose, from the redundancy of that domestic freedom which we have described them to possess, have held forth to America the offer of *English Liberty*, no less sincere in their design, than fortunate in the means; for they have offered peace by
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the swords of forty thousand soldiers,
and freedom by the intervention of
German hirelings.

F I N I S.



